

Victim of Crime Overseas

Please contact the U.S. Embassy Consular Section if you are the victim of a serious crime. The Department of State web site describes the type of assistance that the Consular Section can offer to [Victims of Crime Overseas](#).

Thousands of American citizens travel to Sierra Leone each year and most experience an enriching and incident-free trip. However, some unexpected crime and inconveniences do befall some American citizens visiting Sierra Leone.

Petty Crime

Minor street crime is very common in Sierra Leone, particularly in cities. Most reported incidents involve pickpockets, purse-snatchers, and street scam artists, who are especially active in large crowds and around tourists. Aggressive vendors, panhandlers and street children may attempt to divert your attention while an accomplice prepares to rob you. To avoid theft, it is advisable to avoid walking alone in isolated areas or on beaches, particularly at night, lock doors and close their windows when driving, and avoid public transportation. To minimize inconvenience in the event of theft, carry copies, rather than originals, of passports and other identification documents. Carry a credit card only if it will be used soon, rather than carrying it as a routine practice.

American citizens are encouraged to use common sense and situational awareness to ensure personal safety and to reduce the risk of becoming a crime victim. Always be aware of the surroundings, especially in large cities and crowded places such as markets and taxi parks. Keep a low profile, remain vigilant, and avoid potential conflict situations. Do not wear flashy clothing or jewelry, and be cautious about displaying any amount of currency in public. Use common sense when faced with something out of the ordinary or if someone is following you.

Violent Crime

Violent crime is not common in Sierra Leone, but it does occur. If confronted by criminals, remember that cash and valuables can be replaced, but life and health cannot. American citizens are encouraged to walk away from a criminal confrontation no matter the material cost.

Business Scams

These scams pose a danger of both financial loss and physical harm. Typically, business scam operations begin with an unsolicited communication (usually by email) from an unknown individual who describes a situation that promises quick financial gain, often by the transfer of a large sum of money or valuables out of West Africa. The perpetrators of these scams often claim to be victims of various western African conflicts or relatives of present or former political leaders. In some cases, a series of "advance fees" must be paid in order to conclude the transaction, such as fees to open a bank account, or to pay certain taxes. In fact, the final payoff does not exist since the purpose of the scam is simply to collect the advance fees. Another common variation consists of a request for the U.S. citizen's bank account information, purportedly to transfer money into the account. Once the perpetrator obtains this information, he transfers all money out of the victim's account. Other variations include apparently legitimate business deals requiring advance payments on contracts and

offers to sell gold at a very low price. In the last case, the seller may present real gold to be verified then substitute fake gold and disappear with the payment.

The best way to avoid becoming a victim of advance-fee fraud or business scam is to use common sense: If an offer seems too good to be true, it is probably a scam. Carefully research any unsolicited business proposal originating in Sierra Leone before you commit funds, provide goods or services, or undertake travel. For additional information, the Department of State's brochure, Advance Fee Business Scams is available via the Bureau of Consular Affairs home page at <http://travel.state.gov>.

Dating Scams

In a typical personal scam, the scammer typically meets the American citizen online and quickly develops a romantic relationship. The scammer then asks the American citizen to send money for essential purposes: living or travel expenses, medical treatment, visa costs or bribes to free unjustly imprisoned family members. Scammers often claim emergency circumstances, hoping that the intended victim will send money quickly and without careful consideration. Many variations of these scams exist, all with the principal goal of soliciting money from the American citizen.